

INTRODUCTION

The Interactive Text

The studies developed in *Textual Dynamics of the Professions* concretely elucidate the broad abstraction that writing is social action. Writing is more than socially embedded: it is socially constructive. Writing structures our relations with others and organizes our perceptions of the world. By studying texts within their contexts, we study as well the dynamics of context building. In particular, by understanding texts within the professions, we understand how the professions constitute themselves and carry out their work through texts.

This view that texts are dynamic, causal entities in the social environment rejects some assumptions common in modern criticism. Textual analysis typically isolates texts from their social and intentional origins. The trained literary critic who attributes specific authorial purposes to creative works is accused of perpetrating the "intentional fallacy." The view that texts are independent of authorial purpose and social origin, the outgrowth of postwar literary criticism, associates texts with artistic creativity. The enduring Romantic thesis of self-transcendence in the act of creation promotes the kind of vigorous attention to textual detail that vastly enriches – and complicates – the reading of authors of the literary canon, whether Shakespeare, Melville, Austen, or Dickinson. On the other hand, concepts of textual independence tend to ignore the profound material basis of all texts, while discarding as inconsequential those texts that have manifestly functional purposes.

The illusion of the self-sustaining text is maintained, surely, by the abstraction of the library as a repository of "literature" and "knowledge." Book-objects, removed from the social tangle of their textual origins, are grouped alphanumerically in classes of subject, genre, language, historical period, and discipline. Exegetical traditions associated with the library retain their identifications with these abstract categories. In the library interior, always reminiscent of the chapel or cathedral, the text exists in a timeless, contemplative silence, away from the secular compromises of daily human transactions. We are thus conditioned to associate the text and all its attendant acts with academic remove. This hieratic removal overintellectualizes the notion of text and stigmatizes the worldliness of the literature of transactions. The social functions of texts, and how texts

manage those functions rhetorically, have rarely been considered fit subjects for serious scholarship.

In the workplace, be it academic, white collar, or blue collar, we are met with texts whose functions are unfamiliar in the realm of polite letters or the library. Yet these texts have almost certainly had as great an impact on our modern culture and concepts of reality as the literary canon. These texts are the transactions that make institutional collaboration possible; they are the means by which individuals collectively construct the contexts out of which intellectual and material products emerge. In the pragmatic worlds of these specialized work communities, text is a force that transforms human physical and conceptual limits. The discourse of social transactions is typically functional, material, and purposive. Yet, it still exploits all the underlying rhetorical resources of language. Its dynamics are the dynamics of all texts. Textual analysis thus yields us important new avenues into this social realm, as we see text constructing versions of reality. The textual autonomy associated with the library fails in the workplace, where textual dynamics are a central agency in the social construction of objects, concepts, and institutions.

Exploring Textual Dynamics

The studies developed in this volume are concerned with exploring the textual side of social construction. The phrase "textual dynamics" refers to the idea that written discourse is produced by a complex of social, cognitive, material, and rhetorical activities; in return, written texts dialectically precipitate the various contexts and actions that constitute the professions. These activities, as the studies of this volume show, yield to several modes of analysis, borrowing from writing pedagogy, rhetorical studies, literary theory, linguistics, cognitive studies, sociology, and historical analysis. This methodological diversity, however, converges upon a striking subject matter well outside the traditional domain of textual analysis.

In these essays, we see how the shifting configurations of written discourse that people create to address their immediate social needs actively shape psychological, social, political, physical, and even fiscal realities. Out of provisional clusterings of people, activities, and language emerge highly organized professions of great social consequence. Once established, professions maintain their organization, power, and activity in large part through networks of texts. As these professions increasingly form the framework of modern existence, their texts set the terms of our lives. The better we understand the textual dynamics of the professions, the better we can appreciate the world we have made and continue to make through

text. This effort to locate the place of self and society in the world, by means of examining the role of text in constructing that world, is one of the traditional tasks of the humanities.

Themes of the Dynamics

We have grouped the studies of this collection into three closely related themes identified as (1) textual construction of the professions, (2) the dynamics of discourse communities, and (3) the operational force of texts. These distinctions are largely matters of emphasis, since several of the essays might conceivably be collected under all three categories. On the other hand, the themes help to focus attention on three important aspects of text in the professions. The first is the important role texts play in profession-building. This process is seen in the rigorous manner in which textual forms and definitions impose structure on human activity and help to shape versions of reality. The second cluster of essays focuses on this process from the transactional standpoint of various discourse communities, as their members attempt to locate the tools of consensus. In this section, we see the enrollment activities of profession-building and profession-maintenance at work. The third group of essays explores texts as they give rise to actions. The emphasis here is on the powerful role texts assume in shaping the daily actions of individuals and the rather far-ranging social consequences thereof. These three themes by no means exhaust the possibility of our subject matter, but they do illustrate the crucial role texts play in our social constructions of reality.

TEXTUAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE PROFESSIONS

The essays in the first section of this collection explore the ways in which texts help shape professional perspectives of human experience. Textual construction is an essential part of this process, giving shape and stability to the versions of reality located in the subject matter. In Charles Bazerman's introductory essay, for example, Joseph Priestley's historicizing of discovery is viewed as a textual means of consolidating the scattered productions of natural philosophers into a stable and progressive knowledge structure. Priestley's rhetoric of science coordinates texts in order to promote a new kind of social interaction. Priestley's rhetorical problem is similar to that Greg Myers finds in the review article: to give order to the past, so as to establish a shared present that will be the basis for coordinated work in the future. In "Stories and Styles in Two Molecular Biology Review Articles," Myers compares two apparently different review articles from the same period to show how molecular biologists

James Darnell and Francis Crick use the device of plot to weave diverse scientific papers into two stories of professional progress. Others, he argues, are thus encouraged to shape their own research in a manner that continues the narrative. This temporal structuring of the labor of the many also accommodates important social themes of progressive inquiry that drive the ideological machinery of the sciences.

In an illuminating contrast to the first two studies, Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor explore a number of rhetorical conventions that constitute available means of persuasion within literary criticism, organized around *topoi* that often seek to demonstrate textual complexity. This testimonial rhetoric reinforces value systems and is, in this respect, less like the modelling process of the rhetoric of professional research than the ceremonial rhetoric of the self-reinforcing religious community. Criticism, serving epideictic functions, praises and blames texts in ways that reinforce a particular moral attitude toward the world, thereby giving pleasure to members of the literary community.

The textual harnessing of human social energies to support institutional versions of reality is seen in a more general context in the studies of Ann Harleman Stewart and Les Perelman. Stewart examines some of the textual dynamics by which the business professions constitute an academic subject matter that has some claim to extra-academic reality. In "The Role of Narrative Structure in the Transfer of Ideas," she demonstrates how the ordering of events in case studies, deliberately left unresolved, imparts a calculated heuristic quality to the materials by appealing to the reader's psychological need for closure. As the reader is pulled in to help construct "plot," causal elements are inferred from temporal circumstances. Perelman, using a historical example, likewise explores the textual channeling of social energy. In "The Medieval Art of Letter Writing," he considers how textual formulae contributed to institutional self-definition at a time when ecclesiastical authority was rapidly expanding and consolidating in medieval Europe. The formal rhetorics of letter writing, the *ars dictaminis*, he argues, enabled a new religious bureaucracy both to constitute itself and to control social practice by fixing and thus stabilizing a variety of common secular transactions. By such means, rhetorical forms set standards for the structuring of human relations.

To conclude this first section, James Zappen reviews some of the ways in which nineteenth-century ideological implications are lodged in rhetorical practices. In "Scientific Rhetoric in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Herbert Spencer, Thomas Huxley, and John Dewey," he examines the role of rhetoric in the ideological construction of social discourse. These ideologies mainly concern the relations of science and society. Spencer and Huxley, he argues, follow rhetorical models that subordinate science to the service of society; Dewey gives rhetorical

authority to organized science and, in the process, subsumes society within science. This essay explicitly considers a theme that underlies all the studies in the volume: how communities establish themselves as distinctive through their discourse practices and how they then relate to other communities that lie outside their domain.

THE DYNAMICS OF DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES

The second section of the collection shifts the emphasis to the activities of social construction by examining how discourse communities rhetorically structure and maintain their interests. These essays emphasize the discursive process as a means of inducting or enrolling outsiders into an insider's views and commitments. In the first two essays, for example, we see how the learning of discursive models guides the process of enrolling individuals into certain professions. Cheryl Geisler's study "Toward a Sociocognitive Model of Literacy: Constructing Mental Models in a Philosophical Conversation" examines the strikingly different ways in which novices and experts construct their respective discourses in the subject of philosophy. The norms of professions, she suggests, are embodied, to a considerable extent, in the specific discursive models recognized by individual practitioners. These schema, which are based on actual philosophical debates, furnish trained philosophers with models that help them structure the content of their reading, as well as to construct their own written discourse. Novices, lacking professional schemata, respond in intuitive, idiosyncratic ways to the claims in their readings. Geisler's study is supported in the findings of Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman in "Social Context and Socially Constructed Texts." This study examines ways in which writers exploit generic rhetorical structures to impose the specialized perspective of an interpretive community upon a subject matter. The authors examine the changing rhetorical strategies in the introductory section of a student's papers as the student becomes enrolled into a research community. The student increasingly uses professional context-setting devices invoked in specialized terms, problem statements, and research linkages that constitute a plausible disciplinary model.

The use of rhetorical models to enroll novices into professions with their specific conceptual commitments is examined in yet another respect by Schwegler and Shamoon in "Meaning Attribution in Ambiguous Texts in Sociology." Based on interpretive models followed by specialized discourse communities, the authors construct the presuppositions upon which academicians critique student papers. Textual criticism is shown to be part of the dynamic by which novices are enrolled into the conceptual and rhetorical order that embodies the commitments of a profession. Sociologists reading student papers invoke discipline-specific structures as a

means of locating the ambiguities of student texts and then suggest rhetorical remedies to the student. In these classical educational processes, textual criticism serves to socialize the novice, who accepts rhetorical goals identified with accepted professional goals. As textual insufficiencies are revealed to student authors, students are introduced to the rhetorical framing and manipulating techniques associated with the professionalization of subject matter.

The rhetorical complexities of enrollment into discourse communities are seen in the failures traced in Gail Stygall's "Texts in Oral Contexts: The 'Transmission' of Jury Instructions in an Indiana Trial." Stygall locates the limits of induction in the classical courtroom predicament, where jurors—typically novices to the legal professions—are enlisted into the specialized discourse community of the courtroom. In effect, we see a boundary between two discourse communities, where jurors, accustomed to the demotic discourse of transactions that are socially representative, are introduced to the hieratic discourse of legal specialists, who use language to construct specialized legal conventions. Different rhetorical agendas are pursued. The jury instructions ostensibly attempt to induct novices orally into an unfamiliar discourse community that is precipitated around written courtroom processes. But the rhetorical agenda of the instructions answer less to juror needs, than to the legal maneuvers of lawyers and judges.

THE OPERATIONAL FORCE OF TEXT

In the final section, we explore the dynamics of how texts, originating within specialized discourse communities, can profoundly influence a wide range of common social activities. Such texts do not follow the rhetorical models of formal professional research, although they invoke the authority of expertise to make their general recommendations. Thus, we come to another dimension of textual dynamics different from the *construction* and *enrollment* activities of parts 1 and 2: an *operational* mode where the expertise originating within the more narrowly defined research processes is rhetorically transformed into broader terms of socially operative texts that guide human actions. These texts constitute the transactional domains, where the hieratic discourse of expertise is converted to the demotic discourse of everyday practice.

Examples of how texts and human actions are interdependent are often found in failures. In "Text and Action: The Operations Manual in Context and in Court," James Paradis examines the interconnections among different social worlds in the literature of product instructions. This literature—a vast, largely submerged, body of informal texts—furnishes the discourse by which the products of expertise are converted to the terms

of human actions. Paradis explores how instructions for a publicly marketed tool serve to mediate between the world of technologists and manufacturers and the everyday world where tools are employed. Using the courtroom as a complex forum that brings together several worlds, Paradis explores how these submerged texts are socially legitimized in tort law and the concept of liability.

Rhetorical disjunctions also lie at the heart of the next two studies, in which failures in the deployment and commercialization of technology are the consequences of actions based on texts. In "Understanding Failures in Organizational Discourse: The Accident at Three Mile Island and the Shuttle Challenger Disaster," Herndl, Fennell, and Miller explore the rhetorical basis for social disaster in two well-known technological incidents. Analyzing document clusters on formal linguistic, pragmatic, and argumentative levels, they find that within the same "discourse community" managers and engineers familiar with different argumentative resources defined problems in different ways. Arguments had difficulty being sustained across these social groupings, resulting in different actions being perceived as appropriate to the same set of circumstances. Similarly, in "Creating a Text/Creating a Company," Stephen Doheny-Farina looks at the textual basis for the financing and development of a new software corporation. Through interviews and text analysis, he traces the role of a text — a proposal — in initiating the activities of numerous investors, university faculty, students, administrators, and software engineers to capitalize and staff a new company. The proposal, a rhetorical idealization with the theme of investing in high-tech and "the future" has severe shortcomings as the material basis for the activities of everyday corporate reality. These shortcomings ultimately lead to the company's failure.

In the final two studies, socially operative texts materially shape the activities of specialists, whose discourse governs two very fundamental social realms: taxes and mental health. Amy Devitt examines the discourse of tax accountants, a community that stands between the legal system and everyday financial matters. In "Intertextuality in Tax Accounting," she shows how tax codes shape human financial activities on a massive scale. Tax documents are bound in a textual system that serves to translate the activity of finance into legal representations. Hence, the tax code, providing an intertextual reference point for all tax-related documents, furnishes the basis for diverse institutional activities. In "A Psychiatrist Using *DSM-III*," Lucille McCarthy locates another example in which text is profoundly involved in the creation of social reality. The world of mental phenomena is regulated by texts. She finds in the American Psychiatric Association's taxonomy of mental disorders (known as *DSM-III*) a charter document that substantially influences the rhetoric of mental health in standard psychiatric clinical reports on individuals. On the basis of

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interviews, observations, and text analysis, she argues that the taxonomy provides the framework for psychiatric diagnosis, as well as for its subsequent clinical practice, research, and fiscal-institutional arrangements. Hence, the taxonomy constructs at many rhetorical levels the realities that guide the actions of the psychiatric world in which individual mental health is mediated.

Conclusion

The multiplicity of textual activities revealed in the studies of this volume suggests that we live in a very complex rhetorical world indeed. We consistently find texts functioning to consolidate professional interests, enroll novices into the professions, and direct human activity with far-ranging social consequences. The world, on the other hand, cannot be reduced to the rhetorical domination of a powerful monolithic discourse of science and technology, as is sometimes feared. While professional discourses may hold much influence over many aspects of our lives, they provide varied enough voices to maintain a robust rhetorical environment and keep the forces of reductionism at bay. And they provide enough of a rhetorical challenge to require our best efforts at understanding them.